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# Internship Guidebook

For Employers



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# Internship Guidebook

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## For Employers

### *Internship 101*

This Guidebook is intended for employers with any level of knowledge of internships. It can serve as a training tool for those seeking to:

- Understand what an internship program is and is not
- Identify the purpose of an internship program
- Understand what an internship program should accomplish
- Determine the goals of an internship program
- Assist in the designing of an internship program
- Train staff on the internship process
- Gain an insight into experiential learning
- Understand the Fair Labor Standards Act as it applies to internships

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# What is an internship?

An internship is a work experience in which a student participates at a worksite as an active team member contributing to meaningful projects.

Experience is becoming a crucial factor for employers when writing job descriptions, when deciding whose application and resume makes the cut during candidate selection, and ultimately deciding who gets their foot in the door.

Many college programs now require the completion of an internship to receive degrees. The number of hours required varies, as do the formats; however, there is a catch-22. Internships are essential to break into fields where education takes a backseat to experience, but the experience cannot be gained without the education. This can only be overcome using internships to give students the necessary foothold to gain employment in entry-level work.

## The values of an internship

Internships are not one-way streets of opportunity or gain. Rather, internships offer a potential symbiotic relationship between student and employer.

### For the Student

Internships show employers that scholastic learning has been combined with practicable skills. It takes what a student has learned in school and applies it to a profession.

In addition to demonstrating capabilities, and developing job experience, internships help expand professional networks and increase visibility in the industry.

Students have the opportunity to understand the industry, the company, work culture, organizational expectations, and day-to-day tasks and responsibilities of a job, so that they can make an informed decision about pursuing a career in the field.

### For the employer

Internship programs offer many benefits to employers both in the short-term and in the long-term.

#### Short-term

- Inexpensive or free labor at the cost of providing training.

- Gain an understanding of prospective employees' knowledge and skills by observing the interns in action rather than by reading job applications and resumes.
- Internships programs can assist in an organization's diversity initiatives, efforts, or programs.
- Interns can bring new energy and insights to your projects.
- Perfect for short-term and long-term projects
- Interns can work on tasks that are beneficial to and appropriate for their education and work experience, and thereby free up senior staff to work on advanced projects.

## Long-term

- Ready access to a pool of potential candidates for future employment.
- Potential to gain community, industry, and media recognition through positive contributions to both education and industry sustainment.
- Train potential candidates before hiring, taking advantage to train them to your specific company and operations.
- Provides the opportunity for existing employees to gain leadership and management experience through the supervising of interns.

## Learning

An internship represents the opportunity for students to learn and develop essential skills that education alone cannot provide. In addition, employers become familiarized with the training and instruction that potential employees are receiving in schools, colleges and training centers.

Experiences gained in an internship environment develop new competencies and abilities that cannot be taught in the classroom alone. For example, problem-solving skills are an invaluable quality in an employee; however, this ability comes from the direct experience of dealing with real-world issues and problems, not from reading a textbook. There are some areas of learning that can only be accomplished through the direct cause-effect and fluidity that the workplace provides.

There are two concepts in education, which are important to remember in order to understand the essential nature and value of internships: engaged learning and experiential learning. Engaged learning is the principal that people learn most effectively when active connections are made to the subjects they are learning. In engaged learning a student is an active participant in learning rather than a passive recipient.

Experiential learning is the principal that experience is a potent and effective teacher. An essential component to experiential learning is the reflection that occurs which links and incorporates the experiences of the workplace into the academic knowledge obtained in the student's education.

Engaged and experiential learning is accomplished in the internship through:

- Linking the concepts learned in the classroom to new situations.
- An opportunity to participate in interpersonal collaboration.
- A development of cross-disciplinary skills.

What a supervisor can do to provide for engaged and experiential learning:

- Provide tasks and assignments that have a clear purpose and require significant effort. Assigning sole responsibility of task or assignment can allow for an engagement of the intern's interests and help them understand their strengths and weaknesses as it relates to both the work and the field itself.
- Provide tasks and assignments that require frequent decision-making.
- Provide constructive feedback, which is specific and concrete. Feedback should apply to the specifics of a situation with an emphasis on being descriptive rather than interpretive. The final aspect of providing feedback is to question the recipient to determine if they have understood.
- Provide opportunities to apply learning, and then later to reflect on those experiences. The time and opportunity to reflect on experiences should not be undervalued, as reflection is an essential element to life-long professional development.

## The Student and the Professional

The interns you are likely to encounter in the non-liberal arts degrees are participating in internships because it is the culminating course in their academic program's sequence and they are now seeking an experience to gain an even greater level of knowledge. During this period of time the student will apply and develop the theories they learned in the classroom to how it is practiced in real-world situations, and also how it is practiced in your particular organization.

As a professional reading this guide, you are intimately aware of both theory and practice; however, you the professional have learned to move between theory and practice in order to adapt to the situation. Moving between abstract and generalized concepts to subjective and solid reality is not a skill that is easily taught in a classroom. As a professional guiding an intern, you have the opportunity to help the future professional navigate through this arena of integrating theory into practice that are best be taught by yourself.

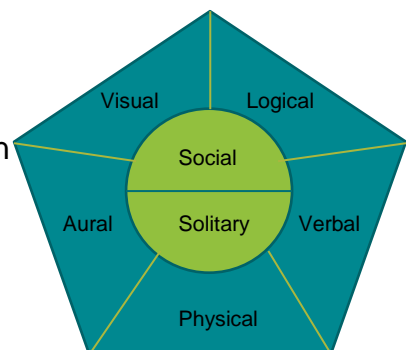
# Learning Styles

Different people learn in different ways. The success of teaching another person is highly dependent on how that person learns in relation to how he or she are being instructed; this fact is true whether you are teaching an intern, a co-worker, or even a family member. It is an important concept to remember when teaching others, which is that they may learn differently than yourself. Some learn most effectively from reading, some from discussion, and others from hands-on experience. When attempting to instruct another person, ask him or her if either already know which way they learn best. Doing a simple internet search of “learning styles tests” will yield results of free testing in this subject. Understanding how a person learns can lead to both personal and professional development for both the teacher and the student.

## 7 Learning Styles

The following learning styles do not represent a singular way in which a person learns; rather a person learns using a mixture of styles. Often a person prefers a singular style above all others and then uses other styles to help assist in learning depending on the situation.

- Visual – using pictures, images, observation
- Aural – using sound and listening
- Verbal – using both written and verbal communication
- Physical – using a hands-on approach
- Logical – using logic and reasoning
- Social – using group discussion and interaction
- Solitary – using self-study



## The Learning Contract

The learning contract (also known as a learning agreement) is the central education plan, which defines what activities, tasks, duties, and responsibilities that an intern will participate in or accomplish during the internship at your organization. Along with what they will be doing, it will be linked to how those things align with an educational learning experience. The learning contract has the benefit of minimizing misunderstandings while ensuring academic integrity. This contract should also be written in such a way as to leave room for change or adaptation to account for possible changes in projects or unexpected opportunities. It is worth noting that allowing the intern to participate in the formation of the learning contract will help facilitate an engaged approach to internship by the student, as they are now taking an active role in their experience.



## Elements of the learning contract

Learning contracts should include:

- Learning goals (e.g. knowledge and skill)
- Activities or objectives to achieve the goals
- Benchmarks or timeframes
- Supervision plan which explains the expectations of both parties

## Designing an Internship Program

Designing and implementing an internship program may seem like a complicated task, but it is actually quite easy. This misunderstanding stems primarily from a lack of understanding of what an intern does, how they are supposed to be managed, and what the end result should be. There are five design features to help you develop your program, and once you have set the groundwork, with these features, you will understand how easy and beneficial it will be for you to have an intern.

### Five design features

1. Develop a job description
2. Establish a plan for orientation and ongoing engagement of your intern in staff meetings
3. Set expectations up front about what could happen post-internship
4. Identify and assign a supervisor or mentor
5. Establish benchmarks and performance criteria to assess progress

#### 1. Develop a job description

When developing a job description for the internship think of it as a job description you would use to hire an actual employee. Alternatively, consider even using elements of existing job descriptions from within your organization. Modeling after existing entry-level positions can have the added benefit of helping to ensure that the intern practices and attains essential skills necessary to find employment within the field. It also has the added benefit of ensuring that qualified and competent people are entering your field and industry.

When writing the internship job description consider as if you were writing the internship duties as accomplishment statements on a resume. The following are useful questions to ask when writing the internship description:

- What will your organization achieve from employing an intern?
- Will the intern work on a project, or possibly multiple projects?
- What will the interns duties be?
- What skills, talents and knowledge are you seeking in an intern?
- Will the intern be working with a team, on their own, or both?
- Will they be doing research and analysis, direct client relationship management, or hands-on technical work?
- Will the work require a high degree of creativity, or will it require an ability to follow precise instructions?
- Are you looking for a student for a summer internship, or someone who is available during the school year?

### ***Things to consider***

- Create high, yet realistic, standards in your job description. You are hiring an intern, not an experienced, advanced worker. Look for interest areas, skills, talents and knowledge that can be developed and expanded.
- Consider a project-focused internship.
- An intern may complete a project or do specific research. Set a clear end date, with specific accomplishments that must be completed.
- Provide the opportunity to engage in other general support work and staff meetings. This will keep them motivated and allow them to see the full workings of the organization.

## 2. Establish a plan for orientation and ongoing engagement

Starting the intern off with a clear understanding of the environment and their responsibilities will not only help them quickly find their place, but also potentially eliminate misunderstandings or confusion in the future. Put yourself in their place; treat them just like a new employee. This inclusion will help create a warm and welcoming environment for everyone involved.

### ***Orientation Basics***

- Office and facility tour
- Staff introductions
- Discuss the dress code
- Establish work hours

- Discuss organizational policies
- Determine workspace
- Discuss pay and pay periods (if applicable)
- Grant access to resources (computer logins, email, servers, etc.)
- If the facility has security, discuss badges and access restrictions
- Discuss documentation, procedures, and resources that are not to be released or discussed outside of the internship (e.g. confidential information, For Official Use Only, etc.)

### ***Orientation Wrap-up***

- Review the internship job description together: discuss tasks, projects, expectations, responsibilities, supervisor/mentor, timelines, etc.
- Discuss the organization's culture and structure. Consider making appointments for the intern to speak individually with key team members and supervisors.

## 3. Set expectations up front about what could happen post-internship

Most internships will end up being solely for the purpose of either meeting educational requirements and/or gaining experience in the student's future career field; however, sometimes it may become a possibility to hire the intern at the end of their internship or have them continue in the capacity of a volunteer if your organization has a volunteer program.

Unlike apprenticeships, internships have no explicit expectations of a job opportunity at its conclusion. It is worthwhile to note that the potential for misunderstandings may exist if either the employer or intern does not understand this process. Ensure that expectations are addressed up front from the beginning. Based on your organization, explain to the intern:

- About full-time job opportunities at your organization
- About part-time job opportunities at your organization
- About lack of open positions
- About future job openings
- About how the job knowledge and skills gained in this internship may qualify them for similar organizations

Even if your organization is not able to employ the intern in the near future due to lack of experience, you are serving as a valuable tool in their education and in helping them to achieve their place in the field.

### ***How you can help an intern for their future in the field:***

- Introduce them to potential employers if the situation presents itself
- Serve as an employment or educational reference
- Write a letter of recommendation
- Allow them to join your LinkedIn network
- Endorse them on LinkedIn

It is very important to remember that this may be the students' first exposure to the field. Never assume that they understand your organization, along with how the field and industry operates outside of the classroom. Understanding this will enable you to assist the intern in obtaining the valuable experience that your organization can provide.

## **4. Identify and assign a supervisor or mentor**

An extremely important component the internship process is that interns are assigned to someone whose is clearly assigned to supervise and mentor interns. By assigning interns to clearly designated individuals in your organization, it clearly defines the relationship. After all, no one wants to be confused about whom he or she report to, or for one of your employees to unexpectedly be thrust with the responsibility at the last moment. This person should be capable of assigning work to the intern, provide necessary training on certain tasks, and be available, as a resource should the intern need guidance.

## **5. Establish benchmarks and performance criteria to assess progress**

Interns will look to their supervisors for feedback. Supervisors should provide regular, formal feedback in addition to informal feedback on a variety of issues, including quality of deliverables; timeliness of deliverables; ability to work with others; communication style and effectiveness; and ability to be creative, resourceful and independent, while following direction.

Effective mentors/supervisors will assess an intern's performance by asking them specific discussion questions. This type of back-and-forth dialogue is often the best way for interns to self-reflect and learn about how their work applies to the organization more broadly. It is also an effective way for supervisors to understand how the intern thinks, interacts and applies their talent.

### ***Potential feedback and discussion questions***

- Tell me about the status of X project?
- What is going smoothly?
- What is posing the most trouble?

- Can you see how your work is contributing to the overall organization?
- What do you see as particular strengths that you are bringing to X project?
- Where do you feel you could improve?
- What do you see as a next step on this project, or what do you see as future development opportunities for us related to this project?

## What to do with your intern

Some employers may have a false impression of what an intern is capable of accomplishing. Remember, these are adults. They have taken the time to dedicate themselves to a position, which is most likely unpaid. Furthermore, many have existing jobs, family responsibilities, and other course work that is occurring simultaneously to their internship. This kind of dedication should not be taken for granted or underestimated. Most interns have been in their degree program for almost 2 years before interning, so they have accrued a large knowledge base, they only need the chance to show you what they know.

### Internship do's

- Set high expectations, but with achievable goals.
- Start the intern off with easy assignments and gradually increase them in difficulty and complexity.
- Assign work that aligns with the knowledge and skills that are required to gain employment in the field.
- Create assignments that the intern can list on resumes.
- Provide for a variety of different work if possible.
- Make sure you review with your intern what they are working on. They may need guidance and not even realize it. If they are working too broadly, narrowly, or even in the wrong direction it is important for both them and you that this be corrected.
- Have daily discussions with the intern. These discussions can address frustrations, unmet supervision needs, and ethical concerns. Realize that the intern may believe that these discussions may be perceived as confrontational in nature, but simply pointing out that this is not the case beforehand can alleviate this concern.
- Share stories. Stories help us retain information to a greater degree. By sharing your work and field related stories you may be passing on a wealth of information that you do not even realize.

## Internship don'ts

It is worth mentioning what an intern is not meant for, and what they should not be doing. This is especially important if they are there for credit in college coursework, as this work experience is essential for their education and future employment opportunities.

- An intern is hired to learn, not to make endless copies and go on coffee runs.
- Internships that fail generally do so because the intern was not given enough work or provided work that allowed them to sufficiently show their skills.

## Intern Career Development

In addition to the valuable learning experience in the field, the skills practiced, and the abilities developed, there exists the potential for an equally beneficial opportunity for this future professional. This opportunity is represented as career development.

## Ideas for intern career development

The following is a list of potential ideas you can use to help the intern in their professional and career development:

- “30-second commercials” or “Elevator Speech” – Studies have shown that when two people meet, an initial impression is generated within the first 10 seconds. The 30-second commercial or elevator speech is intended to introduce yourself to either network contacts or potential employers and offer something that generates a favorable first impression for yourself. Having the intern practice, theirs for you will allow them to gain potentially valuable advice and feedback.
- Informational interviews – During an informational interview, the intern interviews you about your organization and position. Also, consider setting up the intern with an informational interview with someone from senior or executive leadership.
- Exit interviews – Conduct exit interviews whenever an internship ends. Not only will it help you summarize what was accomplished during the program, but also it can give you an overview of what worked and what did not. Interns have a unique perspective in the workplace and can give constructive feedback. They can help you make either the workplace or the program much better.
- Resume and portfolio review – You do not have to be an expert on resume or portfolio development to spot glaring errors or identify areas for improvement. By simply pointing out areas that could use improvement, you can identify issues the intern may not have known existed at all. Also, if possible, consider setting up the intern for a brief meeting with the hiring manager to do the same.
- Consider serving as a mentor after the internship has ended.

- Share your own experiences (both positive and negative) in trying to enter the field.

## Legal Compliance

Legal issues, concerns, and fears are enough to dissuade employers from even attempting to institute an internship program. An understanding of the Fair Labor Standards Act (FLSA) can alleviate many of the concerns. Due to the issues that have been faced in the past regarding the abuse of internships by employers, the U.S. Department of Labor issued new guidance in January of 2018.

### Fair Labor Standards Act (FLSA)

The FLSA defines the term "employ" broadly as including to "suffer or permit to work" ("suffer" is a synonym for "allow"). Technically speaking, the FLSA does not define or explicitly recognize the existence of "interns." Rather, to avoid the FLSA's requirements for minimum wage and overtime, the worker must qualify as either a "volunteer" or a "trainee." Since the concept of volunteer does not fit well with the for-profit sector, the DOL provides a "primary beneficiary test" to determine whether an intern in the for-profit sector qualifies as a trainee to be exempt from the FLSA's minimum wage and overtime provisions.

#### Primary Beneficiary Test

Courts have used the "primary beneficiary test" to determine whether an intern or student is, in fact, an employee under the FLSA. In short, this test allows courts to examine the "economic reality" of the intern-employer relationship to determine which party is the "primary beneficiary" of the relationship. Courts have identified the following seven factors as part of the test:

1. The extent to which the intern and the employer clearly understand that there is no expectation of compensation. Any promise of compensation, express or implied, suggests that the intern is an employee—and vice versa.
2. The extent to which the internship provides training that would be similar to that which would be given in an educational environment, including the clinical and other hands-on training provided by educational institutions.
3. The extent to which the internship is tied to the intern's formal education program by integrated coursework or the receipt of academic credit.
4. The extent to which the internship accommodates the intern's academic commitments by corresponding to the academic calendar.

5. The extent to which the internship's duration is limited to the period in which the internship provides the intern with beneficial learning.
6. The extent to which the intern's work complements, rather than displaces, the work of paid employees while providing significant educational benefits to the intern.
7. The extent to which the intern and the employer understand that the internship is conducted without entitlement to a paid job at the conclusion of the internship.

### ***Avoiding conflicts with the FLSA***

If this guide is followed, then no conflicts should arise from the use of un-paid interns, providing they are not displacing the work of a paid employee. The following are examples of the uses of un-paid interns that would violate the FLSA:

- Basic administrative work, such as drafting cover letters, organizing filing cabinets, making photocopies and running errands;
- Picking up paychecks for co-workers;
- Tracking and reconciling purchase orders and invoices;
- Assembling office furniture;
- Arranging travel plans;
- Chores, such as taking out trash, taking lunch orders, answering phones and making deliveries.

It can be seen by these examples of the type of work that does not fulfill any educational aspects of the internship program. If the work cannot be linked to education, such as doing chores, then it can be seen how this work displaces that of a paid employee.

Employers with unpaid internship programs should develop standard disclosure forms to be signed by prospective interns acknowledging, among other things, that no job is being offered in connection with the successful or unsuccessful completion of the internship. The internship should have specific start and stop dates. In addition, the employer should obtain the intern's signature on a document stating the intern understands that he or she is participating in a valid internship and therefore will not be entitled to wages (or only to minimum wages) for the time spent in the internship.



# The Work Experience Marketplace

Post your open internships as an ongoing application through the Center of Excellence. We can assist you in this process. In this way, you will help sustain an essential market for internships in the industry. You will also be able to continue work on projects that may take longer than what a single intern can provide for you.

The Center of Excellence for Homeland Security Emergency Management's Work Experience Marketplace: <http://www.coehsem.com/workmarketplace/>



## Work Experience Marketplace